

# 7 PEER-TO-PEER FUNDRAISING EVENT PLANNING MISTAKES... AND HOW TO AVOID THEM

Sometimes it seems like running a successful fundraising event is just like juggling. You've got a dozen balls in the air all at once! We've put together this checklist of the 7 things that can really trip you up if you fail to catch them in time. Our list has everything from the seemingly obvious to the: "I never would have thought of that!" Even the biggest and most experienced organizations have forgotten one of these critical success factors. Don't let this happen to you or your event!

1. No goals = No success
2. Failure to communicate
3. Ignoring competing events
4. Poorly managed volunteers
5. Under developing relationships with corporations
6. Where's the contingency plan?
7. Forgetting about the little things



## 1. No goals = no successes

Most fundraising events have more than one goal. In addition to raising money, you may want to expand your universe of supporters or raise awareness for your cause in your community. Capture all your goals and prioritize them. Make sure all your stakeholders - including your volunteers - know exactly what you are trying to achieve.

Just as your organization has a mission and a vision, so should your events. It's especially important to be specific when setting your financial goals. For instance, you can do a year-over-year analysis to see how your campaigns have grown and what you can forecast for this year. If this is the first year of your event, conservatively benchmark your goal against other similar events in your community. If you exceed your target during the campaign, celebrate, but be sure to raise your goal and continue to go after it!

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## 2. Failure to communicate

Make a fundraising calendar with specific tasks, attainable goals, and metrics to measure your performance. Don't be reactionary and wait for issues to pop up - meet those challenges head on. What are the problems you have every year? Some big ones most people run into include:

- Reaching new supporters and expanding the reach of your event and fundraising
- People wait until the last minute to register
- People set up a generic fundraising page and are afraid to ask family and friends for donations
- Fundraiser and donor burnout

If you want to increase the number of teams over last year, have a volunteer or staff member that is dedicated to recruiting new participants. If your organization provides services for individuals with a specific illness, connect with medical practices or hospitals that treat these patients. Don't just look at this as a recruitment tactic - make sure you share information about your mission and stories of people your organization has helped along with event information. If you have specific services you provide, like support groups, free resources, or anything that benefits your community, share information about those services too.

If you're trying to hit a higher fundraising goal than last year, make an effort to help your veteran teams register earlier so they have more time to fundraise. Set up one-on-one coaching sessions with your veteran and new team captains to help them craft their mission story to share with possible donors. Encourage them to add a photo and a personal story to their individual or team fundraising page. People are motivated by storytelling, so train your fundraisers to be good story tellers.

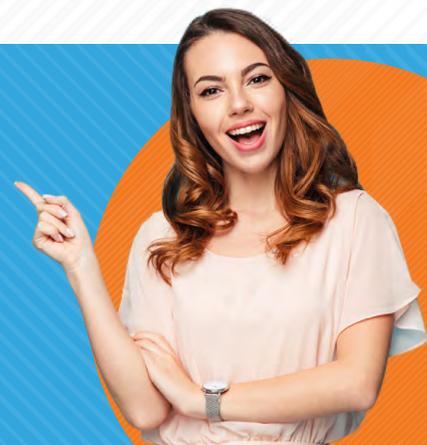
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**TIP:** Tailor your communications for different segments of supporters. While there will be some overlap, make sure you're considering what brand new fundraisers need versus your veteran team captains. Prepare your content in advance and preschedule it to be sent out based on your calendar so you can spend most of your time during the campaign coaching and fundraising. Make sure your fundraising platform includes predictive coaching tips that remind participants when they haven't taken important actions in your system (like posting on social media).

It's a lot of work to put together a communication plan, but it will save you time and a lot of headaches. Also, once you create it the first time, you'll have done most of the hard work and only need to make updates to it for subsequent years.

**TIP:** The research shows that in a typical peer-to-peer event only 50% of participants will raise money for your cause... you can crack this famous "50% problem" when you help your participants to set minimum goal amounts. When the fundraiser sets their own goal, they have a stake in achieving it and it's more likely to be a realistic goal, which will help you forecast for the whole event.



### 3. Ignoring competing events

When you're scheduling your event, look at major holidays, local community events and other large fundraisers in your area. Lot of organizations release calendars for community events that you should consult. Ask your committee member for a list of events they go to every year. Big ones to stay away from include: Superbowl Weekend, Labor Day, Mother's and Father's Day, Memorial Day, and any other major event where lots of people go out of town - for example, the first weekend after primary schools let out for the summer.

On the flipside, some holidays aren't observed by every workplace and could be great days to hold an event. Did you know that Martin Luther King, Jr Day is the only federally observed day of service? Make it a "day on, not a day off" by holding a community service event and fundraiser. Even better, a lot of major companies, including Kaiser Permanente, Marriott International and Accenture, now give employees the day off to complete a day of service for a local nonprofit on MLK Day.



## 4. Poorly managed volunteers

Volunteers are essential to the success of any event. Most nonprofits have small staffs that are overworked and need volunteers to help fill in gaps during events and programs. Once you've done the hard work of recruiting volunteers, make sure you train them! It may seem unnecessary for a one-day event, but training helps volunteers to understand their responsibilities and know the expectations you have for them. Training can happen on site when volunteers arrive or even during a conference call or webinar before the event. The more specific the task they're assigned to, the more specific the training should be. If someone is helping with registration for a large black-tie gala, make sure they know what information to collect from guests, how to use the system to check in attendees, scan credit cards and assist with mobile bidding. When volunteers know what they're doing they are more helpful during the event and more likely to volunteer again. It's a win-win.

You may have a handful of dedicated volunteers who do most of the work at your event, but see if you can recruit extras for specific projects. If you have a few rockstar volunteers, ask them to bring some friends or family members this year.

Appoint a staff person or lead volunteer to manage your volunteers at the event. If you're the event lead, you may get pulled away and have to take care of a minor crisis and you don't want volunteers standing around not knowing what to do while you manage the situation. Create a timeline of tasks that need to be done and put them in order of importance. For example, have them set up registration before they start setting up the space for the post-event celebration. If possible, preassign volunteers and give them a schedule of what they'll be doing and when.

When you list volunteer opportunities online, be very clear about the timeframe they're needed for, venue location and what specific work they'll be doing. Many people get nervous when they don't know what will be expected of them and worry they won't have the skills needed. Be mindful of what people say they'd like to help with, and any physical limitations they have. If someone tells you they have a bad back, don't ask them to unload all the cases of water for the event. And if someone says they love to lift heavy things, let them lift the heavy things! You want to make sure volunteers are safe and happy so they have a positive experience.

**TIP:** When participants are registering for your event, make sure you have an option for them to volunteer for you as well! Explain exactly what's required and what the time commitment would be. You may have set up or clean up tasks that you need help with that won't conflict with the participant running in the race. Send out an email with key event info, volunteer assignments and any other vital information at least a week before the event. This cuts down on volunteers contacting you about simple things like parking or arrival times so that you can focus on last minute fundraising and event logistics. Integrate the volunteer signup into the event registration process to ensure all your data is in one place.

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**TIP:** Head to social media to do some competitive research on other events in your area that could be appealing to your target demographic and drawing attention away from your cause. Twitter is a great place to search. If you plan to create a unique hashtag for your event (for instance: #BikeForGood) make sure that another campaign or company hasn't already used it.

## 5. Under-developing relationships with corporations

Corporate sponsors are more than just a logo on a race bib or a link on your campaign website. Most businesses have a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) plan and are open to expanding their relationship with your organization beyond writing a check. Invite executives to join your revenue committee and help to secure more sponsors. Don't be afraid to get creative with your asks - you're only limited by what you ask for.

Ask your corporate partners if they have employees that would like to volunteer on the big day or in the weeks leading up to your event. If they have a team, offer to do a mini kick-off at their office. You can register new team members, share fundraising tips and further build your relationship during this meeting. Make it easy and come to them during their weekly staff or all hands meeting. And be sure to bring some giveaways (left over t-shirts from previous events are great for this purpose)!

Ask if they have an employee giving program and ask to be included on the list of approved charities. Or, even better, ask them to run a dedicated employee giving campaign to benefit your organization. People increasingly want to work for a company and CEO that gives back to their community, so be sure you provide opportunities for employee involvement on all levels.

It's much easier to expand a current partnership with a corporation than to recruit and build a brand new relationship, so make sure you're giving your current partners creative ways to get more involved.

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## 6. Where's the contingency plan?

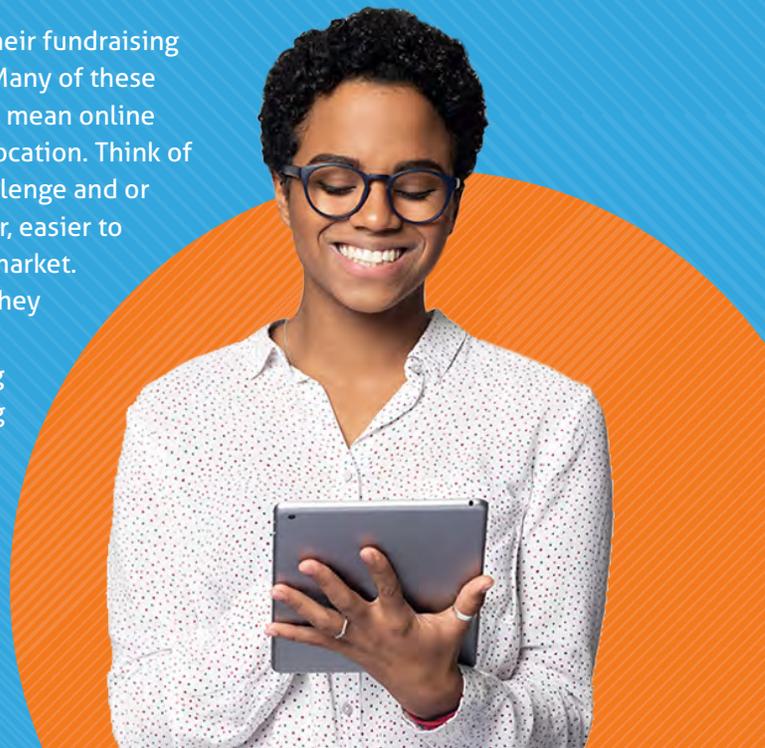
One of the most common questions you'll get from participants is: what happens if it rains? Have a clear, established plan of how to decide whether or not your event is on "rain or shine". Most nonprofits have an inclement weather policy for dangerous weather like high winds, tornados, and hurricanes, but don't have a clear plan for rain. If you decide to have a backup date, communicate this to your participants early and often. Have a makeup date already set before the event. Make a communication plan ahead of time so you know how participants will get this information.

Also, don't assume that people won't come if it rains. People are more likely to not show up if they don't know if an event is going to be held than skip it because of a little rain. Don't make the call at 5AM on event day if possible. Make it as far in advance as possible so people have time to check their email, text messages or your website before leaving. And if it's raining and you're still hosting the event, have tents set up for people to get out of the rain, have some spare ponchos (or garbage bags work in a pinch), and make sure you check with your venue that the route is accessible. If you have a good contingency plan in place, you'll save yourself a lot of stress the week before the event watching the weather forecast.

**"Have a makeup date already set before the event. Make a communication plan ahead of time so you know how participants will get this information."**

**TIP:** Did you know that the majority of Fortune 500 employers will match their employees' donations? Often dollar-for-dollar! Make sure that you include corporate gift matching questions on your online donation pages and pledge forms. Don't miss the opportunity to tell donors that they can potentially DOUBLE the power of their generous pledge to a friend or loved one!

**TIP:** Nonprofit organizations that are meeting (and exceeding) their fundraising goals are quickly adapting to the changing fundraising market. Many of these innovators are embracing "virtual" fundraising. This doesn't just mean online fundraising - it is any campaign that doesn't require a physical location. Think of campaigns like Movember (growing beards), The Ice Bucket Challenge and or World's Greatest Shave. These campaigns are drastically cheaper, easier to run, and have the possibility of moving well beyond their local market. Participants can invite family and friends to participate even if they live across the county. You may already have a "virtual" walker option for your fundraising walk, but you might consider moving the whole event to a virtual experience. The advent of collecting donations while live streaming, social media fundraising and more advances in fundraising technology are rapidly changing the nonprofit industry and the winners will most likely be the organizations that embrace new technology and are flexible to the ways people want to give. But don't forget, even if you move to a virtual event, people still like the personal touch professional fundraisers can provide!



## 7. Forgetting the little things

The devil is in the details... and the details are also the things that people tend to remember. Make sure your attendees have a positive event experience and come back next year by paying attention to all the little pieces of the event that are easily forgotten.

First, do a SWOT analysis. This is best done immediately following an event, but if you're hosting the event for the first time or didn't get a chance to do one last year, there's always time. Identify your event's key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Make a list of the things that have tripped you up in the past and make a plan for how to improve them this year.

Have a run through with your staff and key volunteers at your venue (when possible) and go over the schedule for the day, number of volunteers and volunteer assignments, and most importantly, go over the role that each person will play. It's easy to be so busy yourself that you forgot that others need direction from you. Give them as much information ahead of time so they don't have to find you every time they have a question. Depending on the complexity of your event, you may want to put together a brief document to share with key staff and volunteers that has vendor info, the schedule for the event, key volunteer tasks, and any other vital information on it. You can start creating it at the beginning of the event as you confirm vendors and major details and continuously update so that you don't have to scramble to put something together the week before the event.

If you're working with a huge venue or event space (like say an entire city for a marathon) make sure everyone has a cell phone and that the ringer is on and it's charged. If you expect to be fairly spread out but still within a smaller range, consider renting walkie talkies. They tend to be fairly inexpensive to rent for a day and make it easier to stay in constant contact with your staff.

Finally, don't forget about the guest experience. Consider if there's signage to direct them from the parking area to the check in area. Do you have enough volunteers for check in? Can you open check in a few minutes early to accommodate any early birds and cut down on the rush that happens when everyone arrives at once? Have an email ready to go out several days before the event for all your participants that has the address of the venue, key times and other important details. Again, the more information you give people, the less they'll have to ask you on event day.



**TIP:** Many event participants registered for your event specially because they care about your cause! Are you giving them the option to make a donation without registering for the event as a team/participant? Add a donation form onto your online registration so they can register to volunteer and support your cause at the same time.

There you have it, the top seven biggest fundraising event planning mistakes. And here's a bonus one: try to enjoy yourself! Every fundraising event can be stressful for its organizers. Remember that unexpected things may come up and you may need to put out some (metaphorical) fires, but the most important thing is your organization's mission. Treat your event day as a celebration of your fundraising success and thank everyone that helped you make it a success.

**“Make sure your attendees have a positive event experience.”**